



ZMO-Colloquium Winter Term 2015/2016

*The Future of the City: Contested Urbanism
in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*

Thursday, December 17th, 2015, 5 pm

The Architecture of 'Reprendre' and the Future City. Cases from Kinshasa

By Prof. Dr. Filip de Boeck (University of Leuven)

Venue:

Zentrum Moderner Orient
Kirchweg 33

14129 Berlin

This is a talk about the legacy of colonial modernist architecture in Kinshasa, the social afterlives of colonialist infrastructure, and different historical and contemporary utopian visions of the city.

Through its architecture, colonial modernity introduced the notion of the vertical in the emerging urban landscape of the 1940s and 1950s. One of the early landmarks of Belgian colonial urban architecture was the Forescom tower. Built in 1946, it was Leopoldville's first skyscraper, and one of the first high rise buildings of Central Africa. It embodied and made tangible new ideas of possible futures, and as such the tower materially translated and emblematically visualised colonialist ideologies of progress and modernity. Today, however, rather than referring to the ideal of the vertical, Kinshasa's inhabitants often seem to resort to the concept of 'hole' to describe the urban infrastructure in which they live.

How is the gap between colonial tower and postcolonial hole filled in the experience of Congolese urban residents? How liveable is the legacy of colonialist modernity in the contemporary urban setting? What are the social afterlives of the colonial infrastructural heritage, and what dreams and visions of possible futures, if any, does that colonial legacy still trigger for the residents of Kinshasa today? And how are these older visions replayed and reformulated in the age of a global neoliberal capitalism that has (once again) turned the city into a huge building site? Focusing on a number of specific historical and contemporary built sites in Kinshasa, Filip De Boeck reflects upon colonial modernity's promises, its visions of possible futurities, and the way in which these visions continue to inspire urban life in Central Africa today.

GEFÖRDERT VOM



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Filip De Boeck is a professor of anthropology at the University of Leuven. Since 1987 he has conducted extensive field research in both rural and urban communities in D.R. Congo (ex-Zaire). He is the co-editor (with Alcinde Honwana) of *Makers and Breakers. Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa* (Oxford: James Currey, 2005). Other book publications include *Kinshasa. Tales of the Invisible City*, a joint book project with photographer Marie-Françoise Plissart (Ghent/ Tervuren: Ludion / Royal Museum of Central Africa, 2004). In 2010 De Boeck also released *Cemetery State*, a documentary film which examines urban youth's politics of death in a Kinshasa graveyard. Together with Congolese photographer Sammy Baloji, De Boeck is currently working on a book and exhibition project about new urban extensions in D.R. Congo.